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THE ATHENIAN EPHEBIC OATH

BY JOHN WILSON TAYLOR
University of Chicago

Until quite recently the opinion has been widely held that it was essentially undemocratic for the state to lay upon the individual citizen a peremptory demand for his services, supported, if need be, by force. This was of a piece with that suspicion of governmental power as such which has descended to all English-speaking peoples as a legacy from the struggle of the Commons in England against their autocratic monarchs, the Stuarts. But the present war has conclusively demonstrated that such a belief can never form part of the creed of a democracy which is obliged to vindicate its right to existence by a proof of its will and power thereto. This fact is abundantly illustrated by that democracy par excellence, the Athenian state. Aristotle in the *Constitution of Athens* recently discovered in Egypt has given us a much clearer insight into the military training of the young Athenian citizen than we were obliged to be content with previously. It may be of interest at the present time to recount briefly the facts given by Aristotle regarding this training, along with the text and a short discussion of the oath administered to the young men.

At the age of eighteen the names of the young men were entered in the registers of the demes. They had then to submit to an examination before their demesmen in order to establish their age and the citizenship of their parents. Those who stood the test became ephebi. The others, if they failed in the test of age, were returned to the status of minors; but if they failed in the test of birth they might either accept the verdict or exercise their right of appeal to a popular court. Before it each youth defended his case against five accusers chosen from the deme he proposed to enter. If his appeal failed he was sold by the city as a slave. The list of those who passed the tests was finally ratified by the

senate, which had the power to lay a fine on the members of any deme admitting a minor to the class of ephebi.

After this examination and enrolment the fathers of the young men, meeting by tribes, chose three of their number over forty years of age to supervise the young men of that tribe. Of these three the Assembly chose one as a guardian over them, and one man from the whole body of citizens as a director of the ephebi for that year.

These officers collected the youth and led them about the sacred precincts and to the Piraeus, where they were detailed to do guard duty, some at Munychia and others at Akte. Their time was occupied in learning to use the bow, javelin, and catapult while clad in armor. Four obols per man were set aside by the tribe for the support of its youth in training and a drachma for the guardian. All the money was handed over to the latter, who did the marketing for the common table. So the ephebi lived for the first year.

At the beginning of the second year before a gathering of the people in the theater the young men gave a demonstration of their skill in tactics and received from the people a shield and spear. Then, having made a circuit of Attica, the ephebi went on guard for the year. At the end of that year they were full-fledged citizens.

During these two years they were forbidden to use the courts, that they might not have an excuse for absenting themselves from their military duties. An exception was made, however, in cases involving estates and heiresses or priesthoods.

Strangely enough, Aristotle in his account omits all reference to the time or the content of the oath of citizenship administered to these young men.

Fortunately, it is possible to infer the time of the administration of the oath from a note of Ulpian on Demosthenes xix. 303. He tells us that the young men took the oath in full armor. Now Aristotle informs us that the arms were presented before an assem-

¹ Εν δὲ τῷ τεμένει αὐτῆς (Ἀγραύλου) οἱ ἐξιόντες εἰς τοὺς ἐφήβους ἐκ παίδων μετὰ πανοπλιῶν ὥμνον ὑπερμαχεῖν ἄχρι θανάτου τῆς θρεψαμένης. *Oratores Attici*, ed. Didot, II, p. 637. 438, 17.

bly of the people in the theater at the beginning of the second year of the period of training. The conclusion that the oath was taken at this time is further supported by the evidence of a vase painting in the Hermitage, Petrograd.¹ It represents an altar, on one side of which stands a young man. He is giving his right hand to the right hand of an elder man on the other side of the altar. The young man holds a shield and a spear in his left hand. Standing behind him a female figure, probably *νίκη*, holds a helmet ready to present to him. The painting plainly represents the young man taking the oath at the same time that he is being armed. We may therefore conclude that the oath was administered at the beginning of the second year of the ephebic training.

For the content of the oath we are indebted to two main sources and some quotations and summaries.² Pollux (*Onomasticon* viii. 105) and Stobaeus (*Florilegium* xliii. 48) are in substantial agreement in citing the text of the oath. Such variations as occur, together with any important differences in the manuscripts of the

¹ Conze, *Annali dell' Inst. di corr. arch.*, XL, 266, Pl. 1. Cf. also Girard on "ephebi" in *Daremberg et Saglio*, II, 624, Fig. 2677.

² Lycurgus, a senior contemporary of Demosthenes, summarizes the oath in the *Leocrates* 76, saying that the ephebi swear "not to bring reproach on their hallowed arms and not to leave their place in the ranks, but to defend their native land and to hand it down to their children a better country than when they received it" (*μήτε τὰ ἱερὰ ὅπλα κατασχυνεῖν μήτε τὴν τάξιν λείψειν, ἀμυνεῖν δὲ τῇ πατρίδι καὶ ἀμείνω παραδῶσειν*).

Philostratus, also, in the *Apollonius* 4. 21 speaks of the class of ephebi, "who of old used to go and swear in the temple of Agraulus to take up arms and die in behalf of their native land" (*τὸ ἐφηβικὸν, οἱ πάλαι μὲν ὤμνυσαν ἐς Ἀγραύλου φοιτῶντες ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος ἀποθανεῖσθαι καὶ ὅπλα θήσεσθαι*).

Plutarch (*Alcibiades* 15. 7) gives a clause not found in the other sources. He states that the ephebi swore "to hold as the boundaries of Attica the land which bore wheat, barley, vines, figs, and olives, being thereby given to understand that they should make their own the cultivated and fruitful land" (*ὁμνόνουσι γὰρ ὅροις χρῆσασθαι τῆς Ἀττικῆς πυροῖς κριθαῖς ἀμπέλαις συκαῖς ἐλααῖς, οἰκείαν ποιεῖσθαι διδασκόμενοι τὴν ἡμέρον καὶ καρποφόρον*).

Cicero summarizes Plutarch's source in *De Re Publica* iii. 9, saying, "The Athenians also used to swear an official oath that all the land belonged to them which bore the olive tree or grain" (*Athenienses iurare etiam publice solebant omnem suam esse terram, quae oleam frugesve ferret*). This clause probably formed part of the oath when Athens was confident and aggressive, but was dropped sometime after the Peloponnesian war.

two authors, have been indicated and discussed in the notes. The following is the Greek text:

- Οὐ καταισχυνῶ τὰ ὅπλα τὰ ἱερά, οὐδ' ἐγκαταλείψω τὸν
 παραστάτην, ὅτῳ ἂν στοιχήσω, ἀμυνῶ δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ ἱερῶν καὶ
 ὑπὲρ ὁσίων καὶ μόνος καὶ μετὰ πολλῶν. καὶ τὴν πατρίδα οὐκ
 ἐλάσσω παραδῶσω, πλείω δὲ καὶ ἀρείω ὅσης ἂν παραδέξωμαι.
 5. καὶ συνήσω τῶν ἀεὶ κρινόντων [εὐφρόνως] καὶ τοῖς θεσμοῖς τοῖς
 ἰδρυμένοις πείσομαι καὶ οὐστυνας ἂν ἄλλους τὸ πλῆθος ἰδρύσθαι
 ὁμοφρόνως. καὶ ἂν τις ἀναίρη τοὺς θέσμους ἢ μὴ πείθεται, οὐκ
 ἐπιτρέψω, ἀμυνῶ δὲ καὶ μόνος καὶ μετὰ πάντων. καὶ τὰ ἱερά
 τὰ πάτρια τιμήσω. Ἱστορες θεοὶ Ἀγραυλος Ἐννάλιος Ἄρης
 10. Ζεὺς Θάλλω Αὔξω Ἡγεμόνη

Line 1. τὰ ὅπλα τὰ ἱερά=ὅπλα τὰ ἱερά (Stob.).

Line 2. ὅτῳ ἂν στοιχήσω=ᾧ ἂν στοιχῶ (Pol.). ὅτῳ is preferable to ᾧ
 and for ἂν στοιχήσω cf. ἂν παραδέξωμαι l. 4 and ἂν ἰδρύσθαι l. 6.

Line 3. ὑπὲρ ὁσίων=ὁσίων (Pol.).

καὶ τὴν πατρίδα=τὴν πατρίδα δέ (Stob.). New clauses in Athenian oaths
 are introduced by καί, καὶ οὐκ, or οὐδέ, never by δέ. Cf. Hofmann, *De
 Iurandi Apud Athenienses Formulis* (Darmstadt, 1886), p. 32.

Line 4. πλείω δὲ καὶ ἀρείω=πλείω δὲ καὶ καταρόσω (Pol.). πλείομαι is
 the regular form for the future in the early and classical periods. The antithesis
 between ἐλάσσω and πλείω καὶ ἀρείω is destroyed. Lycurgus' summary (p. 497,
 n. 2) supports the reading adopted, since he makes the ephebi swear to leave
 the country better than when they received it.

ὅσης=an emendation of Cobet. ὅσῃν (Stob.), ὁπόσῃν (Pol.).

Line 5. συνήσω=εὐηκοήσω (Stob.). This is the only occurrence of the
 word noted by the lexicographers. συνίημι ("obey") occurs in *Iliad* i. 273.

κρινόντων=κραινόντων (i.e., ἀρχόντων) Cobet in *Nov. Lect.*, p. 223.

ἐμφρόνως Pol. omits here but writes it instead of ὁμοφρόνως in l. 7. The
 Parisianus prior (A) MS of Stobaeus (fourteenth century) has εὐφρόνως. ἐμφρό-
 νως does not seem to make satisfactory sense construed either with κρινόντων
 or συνήσω. Hense, however, in his edition of Stobaeus retains it, but without
 indicating what he supposes it to mean. Blass in his edition of Lycurgus
 inserts the text of the oath in the Leocrates 77, where he omits ἐμφρόνως.
 See note on translation of passage on p. 499, below.

Lines 6-7. οὐστυνας ἂν . . . ὁμοφρόνως=οὐστυνας ἄλλους ἰδρύσεται τὸ
 πλῆθος ἐμφρόνως (Pol.).

Lines 8-9. τὰ ἱερά τὰ πάτρια=ἱερά τὰ πάτρια (Stob.); cf. l. 1.

Line 10. τούτων after θεοί in Stob., who omits the names of the deities.
 For a discussion of the deities see Hofmann, pp. 35 ff.

"I will never bring reproach upon my hallowed arms nor will I desert the comrade at whose side I stand, but I will defend our altars and our hearths, single-handed or supported by many. My native land I will not leave a diminished heritage but greater and better than when I received it. I will obey whoever is in authority¹ and submit to the established laws and all others which the people shall harmoniously enact. If anyone tries to overthrow the constitution or disobeys it, I will not permit him, but will come to its defense single-handed or with the support of all. I will honor the religion of my fathers. Let the gods be my witnesses, Agraulus, Enyalios, Ares, Zeus, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone."

It is to be noted that this oath is at once civil and military, or, better, military and civil. As the former it is a promise to fight bravely in defense of hearth and home and add to the country's territory; as the latter it is a declaration of obedience to the magistrates and loyalty to the institutions. It contains, further, a promise to honor the ancestral gods.

If we compare this oath with the corresponding ones in most modern countries, including the United States of America, several points of difference appear.

In the first place every Athenian was required to take the oath if he wished to become a citizen, whereas with us people are born into citizenship and only those who wish to transfer their allegiance from some other country are called upon to take the oath. Moreover the ground covered by the Athenian oath requires two separate oaths among us: that of citizenship, which has chiefly to do with supporting the institutions and only indirectly with military duties; and the military oath, administered not to every citizen but to those who enter the army. The text of the former runs as follows:

I hereby declare on oath that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty

¹ Dumont in his *Essai sur L'Ephébie Attique* (Paris, 1876), I, 10, reads ἐμφοβῶς and translates "J'obéirai aux ordres, que la prudence des magistrats saura me donner."

Grasberger in *Erziehung und Unterricht im klassischen Altertum* (Würzburg, 1881), III, 29, and Schoemann-Lipsius (*Griechische Altertümer*⁴, I, 379) omit ἐμφοβῶς and translate "Ich will hören auf die, welche jedesmal zu entscheiden haben."

The reading ἐμφοβῶς might be construed with συνήσω to mean "I will cheerfully obey whoever is in authority," but the manuscript evidence is weak.

and particularly to ——, of whom I have heretofore been a subject; that I will support and defend the Constitution and Laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.

The absence in this oath of any hint of religion differentiates it further from the Athenian formula in which the gods are called upon to make the oath binding, a promise is made to honor the ancestral religion, and the arms presented by the people on the solemn occasion at the theater are called sacred. But one notable point of resemblance between the two, as distinguished from the oaths in England and most other countries, lies in the fact that allegiance is sworn to the constitution rather than to any person. This is explained, of course, by the non-monarchical character of the government in both cases.

But the American military oath presents still more significant points of difference as compared with that part of the Athenian oath to which it corresponds. It deals with more details, but the most important aspect of it is the different attitude toward military service and war which it implies. It emphasizes the fact that the soldier is voluntarily entering upon the service, which he will leave in a definite number of years. The Athenian oath, on the other hand, assumes that the responsibility for the defense of the country is implied in citizenship. It is a duty on a par with that of supporting the laws, and there is no more thought of being relieved from one than from the other. But it assumes more. It is logically an avowal of intended aggression against other countries. This was still more in evidence when the clause given by Plutarch and translated on page 497, note 2, above, formed part of the oath, but it is clear even from the formula as given by Pollux and Stobaeus. It naïvely assumes that war is the normal relation between states.

The text of the military oath of the United States is as follows:

I, ——, born in —— in the state of ——, aged —— years and —— months, do hereby acknowledge to have voluntarily enlisted this —— day of ——, 19——, as a soldier in the Army of the United States of America for the period of seven years in active service and in the Army Reserve for the

periods and under the conditions prescribed by law, unless sooner discharged by proper authority; and do also agree to accept from the United States such bounty, pay and rations and clothing as are or may be established by law.¹ And I do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America; that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies whomsoever, and that I will obey the orders of the president of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the rules and articles of war.

¹ When the oath is administered to those called to the colors under the recently enacted Selective Draft Law, the first part, ending with the words "established by law," is omitted.